What Helps and Hinders the Hopefulness of Post-Secondary Students Who Have Experienced Significant Barriers

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Abstract

This study investigated how undergraduate students in Canada and the United States experience high levels of hope in the face of challenges, specifically, what helps and hinders their hopefulness. Enhanced Critical Incident Technique was used, consisting of in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowing for open-ended, clarifying questions. Fifteen students self-reporting high levels of both hope and barriers were interviewed to ascertain their definitions of hope and the factors that helped and hindered hopefulness. Participants defined hope as a multidimensional concept involving affective, cognitive, behavioural, affiliative, contextual and temporal factors. 281 incidents revealed internal and environmental factors that influenced hope. Internal factors included future goals, attitude, passion, self-efficacy, social and professional contribution, refocusing activities, negative emotions and cognitions, and health. Environmental factors included support, role models, possibilities and opportunities, school, negative/ unsupportive people, situations outside one's control, and economic/financial challenges. Spirituality emerged as an internal and environmental factor. Relationships emerged as having the most significant positive and negative impact on hope. Findings suggest that hope and the factors influencing it can play an integral role in students' personal and career development, and that there is need for career counsellors in post-secondary Career Services departments.

Résumé de recherche

Cette étude avait pour bu d'examiner les conditions dans lesquelles, les étudiants de premier cycle au Canada et aux États-Unis, face aux épreuves à surmonter, ressentent un fort espoir, en particulier lorsqu'ils sont confrontés à ces défis, et c'est spécifiquement ce qui favorise ouentrave, leur espérance. Nous avons employé une méthode améliorée des incidents critiques, comprenant des entrevues tour à tour en profondeur et semi-structurées, donnant lieu à des questions ouvertes et également à des questions de clarification. Pour ce faire, nous avons interrogé un panel de quinze étudiants déclarant à la fois éprouver de vifs espoirs et être confrontés à de nombreux obstacles, afin de connaître leurs définitions respectives de l'espoir et également de déceler les facteurs qui ont favorisé ou freiné leur espérance.

Les participants ont défini l'espoir comme un concept multidimensionnel dans lequel entrent en jeu des facteurs affectifs, cognitifs, comportementaux, affiliatifs, contextuels et temporels. 281 cas ont été étudiés et ces derniers ont révélé que des facteurs internes et environnementaux avaient influencé le niveau d'espérance. Les facteurs internes prenaient en compte les projets futurs, l'attitude, la passion, l'auto-efficacité, la contribution sociale et professionnelle, le recentrage des activités, les émotions négatives, le niveau de connaissance ainsi que l'état de santé. Les facteurs environnementaux se définissent par les divers soutiens, les modèles à suivre, les possibilités et opportunités, l'école, les personnes négatives / peu coopératives, les situations échappant au contrôle de la personne et les défis économiques/financiers. La spiritualité s'est révélée être un facteur à la fois interne et

environnemental. Il s'est avéré que les relations avaient l'impact positif ou négatif le plus significatif sur le niveau d'espérance. Les résultats suggèrent que l'espoir et les facteurs qui l'influencent peuvent jouer un rôle essentiel dans le développement personnel et professionnel des étudiants et qu'il existe une demande en conseillers d'orientation dans les départements de services d'emploi et d'orientation en études postsecondaires.

Hope plays an integral role in one's life and career (Niles, Amundson & Neault, 2011) as well as in the counselling process (Edey & Jevne, 2003). Among the many factors that should be considered when working with post-secondary students, it is essential to recognize hope and the central role it may play in career development processes. Highly hopeful individuals seem to achieve higher performance in their careers, and in general are more likely to be satisfied with their life and career (Niles, In, Chen, Su, deShield, &Yoon, 2013). It is inevitable that individuals will face challenges and barriers during the course of their lives and careers that can affect feelings of hopefulness. However, research suggests "the course of hope and hopelessness is dynamic and changing in response to maturation and adaptation to life events" (Stoddard, Henly, Sieving & Bolland, 2011, p. 279). The purpose of this study was to understand how a group of post-secondary students in Canada and the United States experience high levels of hope in the face of sig-

nificant barriers, specifically what helps and hinders their experiences of hope in their lives and careers.

Definitions

There are varying definitions of hope within the literature and across disciplines. Dufault and Martocchio (1985) conceptualize hope as "a multidimensional dynamic life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a future good which is realistically possible and personally significant" (p. 380). They identify two spheres of hope, generalized and particularized, which function together and reciprocally. Particularized hope involves a specific goal and includes affective, cognitive, behavioural, affiliative, contextual and temporal factors. Generalized hope involves the expectation that the future will be positive without focusing on a particular outcome; they describe it as "an intangible umbrella that protects hoping persons by casting a positive glow on life" (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985, p. 380). Similarly, Stephenson (1991) defines hope as "a process of anticipation that involves the interaction of thinking, acting, feeling, and relating, and is directed toward a future fulfillment that is personally meaningful" (p. 1459). Meanwhile, Snyder (2002) defines hope as an interconnected cognitive construct with three components: "the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways" (p. 249). The first component,

goals, is having the ability to imagine meaningful career goals. Pathways thinking involves having specific strategies for achieving these goals. Finally, agency thinking requires believing that one can achieve one's goals. For example, if the individual has goals and strategies but is unable to use agency thinking then she or he will likely find it difficult to persevere during difficult times or when faced with obstacles (Niles et al., 2011; Niles, 2011).

In addition, some authors distinguish hope from optimism. Arnau, Rosen, Finch, Rhudy, and Fortunato (2007) defined hope as a general expectation of positive outcomes where the individual does not necessarily initiate events nor does she or he take specific action to facilitate the events. Scheier and Carver (1985) suggest that optimism is a generalized expected positive outcome regarding goal achievement over the life span which allows people to remain engaged in the pursuit of their goals despite barriers. Bryant and Cvengros (2004) explored hope and optimism both as a unitary construct and as two distinct constructs, concluding that their data indicated that both conceptualizations have merit. In support of two separate constructs, they concluded "hope and optimism factors have greater explanatory power than does a single global 'super' factor, and the two constructs show divergent patterns of association with coping and self-efficacy" (p. 296). However, they also found support for a unitary conceptualization, "hope and optimism share a sizeable portion (64%) of their variance, and a

single global 'super' factor provides a reasonable and parsimonious goodness-of-fit to the data" (p. 296).

Career and Hope

Research has suggested important connections between work and hope. Employees with higher levels of hope are more likely to demonstrate better job performance (Combs, Clapp-Smith, & Nadkarni, 2010; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; Peterson & Byron, 2008), report higher job satisfaction (Tombaugh, Mayfield, & Wooten, 2011; Youssef & Luthans, 2007) and have less absenteeism (Avey, Patera, & West, 2006). Furthermore, higher levels of hope have been associated with increased creativity at work (Rego, Machado, Leal, & Cunha, 2009; Sweetman, Luthans, Avey, & Luthans, 2011), which is notable given that the Conference Board of Canada (2013) identifies creativity and innovation as essential to enhance organizational performance.

Isenor (2011) found that hope may serve as a protective factor against experiencing depressive or grief reactions after involuntary job loss. Ribton-Turner and Bruin (2006) found that unemployed individuals may have differed in the role and importance of spirituality in their lives, but almost all of them drew upon it as a source of support to help them cope daily and sustain hope.

Hope and Barriers

Post-secondary students may encounter a range of barriers in their lives and careers. Diemer and Blustein (2007) suggest that even with the challenges and barriers many students face, they are able to remain focused and connected to their future aspirations due to their level of hope. Hope may be correlated with resilience, which can involve "the use of setbacks as 'springboards' or opportunities for growth" (Youssef & Luthans, 2007, p. 780) in the face of adversity. Furthermore, hope may enable an individual to act on chance opportunities and test possibilities when they present themselves. Indeed, having a sense of hope may allow individuals to consider the possibilities in any emerging or established situation and propel them to take action (Snyder, 2002; Niles et al., 2011).

Hope is considered to be one of the factors that positively influences and enables individuals to cope during times of uncertainty, loss and suffering (Herth, 1993), and to change their lives and come closer to creating the life they desire to live (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). People with high levels of hope with a corresponding high level of agency and a high sense of pathways are more likely to be psychologically resilient and generate a range of options to overcome obstacles (Shorey, Snyder, Yang, & Lewin, 2003; Elliott, Witty, Herrick, & Hoffman, 1991). Conversely, the loss of hope, and the lessening of life goals and expectations is thought to reduce quality of life (Haase, Britt, Coward, Leidy, &

Penn, 1992; Herth, 1993).

Studies have found that hope had an inverse effect on depression (Arnau et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 1991; Shorey et al., 2003) and anxiety (Arnau et al., 2007; Shorey et al., 2003). However, depression and anxiety did not have any long-term impact on levels of hopefulness. The findings suggest hope may be related to resiliency or may be a protective factor. Hope also predicted the development of depression and psychosocial impairment in individuals who acquired physical disabilities (Elliot et al., 1991). Furthermore, students with learning disabilities reported lower academic self-efficacy, lower levels of hope, and they rated their moods more negatively (Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv & Ziman, 2006). Abuse and neglect can also contribute to lower mood, negative cognitions, and feelings of hopelessness. Childhood emotional abuse and neglect have been associated with high levels of hopelessness and depression (Gibb et al., 2001; Teicher et al., 2006), with hopelessness significantly mediating the link between emotional abuse and symptoms of depression (Courtney, Kushwaha, & Johnson, 2008). Rose and Abramson (1992) suggested that children who are emotionally abused are more likely to internalize the abuse, which fosters feelings of hopelessness. Findings from a longitudinal study suggest that emotionally abused children are more likely to experience low levels of hope and increased depressive symptoms over time (Courtney et al., 2008). A study done by Kazdin, Moser, Colbus,

and Bell (1985) looked at depression in physically abused and non-abused psychiatric inpatients ages 6 to 13. The findings revealed greater depression and more hopelessness in the abused relative to the non-abused children.

Finding housing can be a significant challenge for post-secondary students. There is little known about youth housing instability and hope. Additionally, there is conflicting evidence about youth homelessness and hope, which may be complicated by intersecting factors such as physical and mental health, the ability to generate income, and/or educational attainment. Amongst homeless youth in Canada, Hughes et al. (2010) found that poorer self-ratings of physical or mental health were related to less hopefulness; whereas, Karabanow, Hughes, Ticknor, and Patterson (2010) found some homeless youth adopted an optimistic attitude towards negative attitudes of others regarding street level work, with one participant stating "something will come through and you'll just be happy." (p. 50).

Interpersonal barriers also impact feelings of hope, especially in the case of parental relationships. Stoddard, Henly, Sieving, and Bolland (2010) found that youth who reported stronger connections with their mother were less hopeless at age 13. In Snyder's (1994) hope theory, parents "coaching" behaviours affect the development of hope. Further, authoritative parenting has been shown to have a small effect on hope with attachment being predictive of hopeful-

ness (Shorey et al., 2003).

Methodology

In this study, we used Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT; Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005; Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009) to explore what helps and hinders students who have high levels of hope while also facing high barriers. ECIT is based on the critical incident technique (CIT), a qualitative approach developed by Flanagan (1984). The ECIT approach builds on CIT by adding credibility and trustworthiness checks, which reinforce the results attained using CIT (Butterfield et al., 2009). ECIT enables researchers to investigate "effective and ineffective ways of doing something, looking at helping and hindering factors, collecting functional or behavioural descriptions of events or problems, examining success and failure, and determining characteristics that are critical to important aspects of an activity or event" (Butterfield et al., 2005, p.476). ECIT consists of in-depth, semi-structured interviews that allow for open-ended, clarifying questions. Incidents include antecedent information, detailed description of experiences, and descriptions of the outcomes.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from the quantitative phase of Amundson, Niles, Yoon, Smith, In, & Mills' (2013) study, which used the Hope-Centred Career Inventory (HCCI) to

assess the hope-centred career development of Canadian and American post-secondary students. The HCCI (Niles, Joon, Balin & Amundson, 2010) is based on the Hope-Centred Model of Career Development (Niles, Amundson & Neault, 2011), which uses hope as a principal construct, integrating and synthesizing human agency theory (Bandura, 2001), career metacompetencies (Hall, 1996), and hope theory (Snyder, 2002). The HCCI consists of 28 self-reported items designed to assess the degree of hope and hope-related career development competencies. Higher scores indicate a greater degree of hope-centred career competencies. All of the participants selected for the current study had a score of 4.0 on the HCCI, which is the highest score possible. Participants' self-reported barriers using the Perceived Barriers Scale (McWhirter, 1992), with scores ranging from 2.81-3.71 on a five-point Likert scale.

Our focus for this study was on people who self-reported the highest level of barriers along with the highest level of hope, and who were fluent in English. Nineteen of the 676 Canadian respondents (2.8%) and 27 of the 1009 U.S. respondents (2.6%) met the inclusion criteria. Fifteen participants were interviewed in total. Seven of the 19 people eligible to participate from the Canadian universities were interviewed, representing 36.8% of the possible Canadian participants. Eight of the 27 people in the U.S. were interviewed, representing 29.6% of the possible U.S. sample. It should be noted

that these numbers represent a very high response rate relative to the size of the sample.

Amongst the fifteen participants, five were from The University of British Columbia, two from Thompson Rivers University in Canada, one from Pennsylvania College of Technology, and seven from Pennsylvania State University in the United States. All were undergraduates in the first or second year of their current program at the time of the quantitative data collection. Some had more years of post-secondary study but had changed majors and were classified as first or second year students. Participants represented a diverse range of majors including music, social work, engineering, science, business, arts, geography and golf course management, with students considering entering professional programs such as medicine, veterinary sciences, and architecture. Their ages ranged from 18-25 years of age with the average age and modal age being 20. In terms of their grades, five participants reported having mostly A's, nine reported mostly B's, one reported mostly C's. There were 13 females and 2 males in the sample. During the interviews, participants self-reported the following additional demographic information:

- 7 Canadian Citizens, 6 U. S. Citizens, 1 dual U. S. & another country, and 1 international student who had studied in Canada and the U. S.
- 8 Caucasian, 3 Asian, 2 African American, 1 Asian & Caucasian, 1

Middle Eastern
- 14 spoke English as a first language; 1 spoke Mandarin as first language but spoke English fluently
- 1 was married, 14 single
- 2 people had completed careers: 1 military and 1 professional athlete
- 1 person identified as being a member of the LGBT community
- 1 person had step-children

Data Collection

All participants completed an informed consent process approved by the Ethics Boards of the respective educational institutions. The primary interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in duration, depending on the responses of the participants. Participants were asked to discuss what helps and hinders their feelings of hopefulness in the face of barriers. As a way to provide context, participants were also asked to describe their definition of hope. Participants discussed hope in relationship to their lives and their career aspirations and data were analyzed together.

Fifteen interviews were completed with five conducted by telephone and ten conducted in-person. All interviews were audio recorded and handwritten notes were taken. After the preliminary analysis was complete, a second interview was conducted by email in order to provide participants with an opportunity to add, change, clarify or correct their responses.

Data Validation

ECIT involves a number of validation checks (Butterfield et al., 2009). All interviews were audiotaped and analysis was conducted from transcripts to attend to descriptive validity. Interview fidelity was ensured by having an ECIT expert review a select number of transcripts to confirm that the methodology and interview protocol were followed. Interviews continued until no new items occurred to ensure exhaustion. Because no qualified American interviewer was available to conduct the interviews of Penn State and Penn College students, the U.S. based transcripts were analyzed by a member of the research team who is a U.S. citizen to ensure that an appropriate cultural lens was applied during analysis. A second interview by email was conducted with participants to confirm accuracy of the analysis and allow for additions, deletions or changes in order to attend to descriptive validity. Two researchers with career counselling and ECIT expertise reviewed the data until 100% agreement was achieved on all categories and incidents. Two experts with extensive experience in career counselling and research reviewed the categories to determine utility, surprise, and identify any missing items.

Findings

The 15 participants provided definitions for hope, and samples of their definitions are described below. In addition to their definitions, they described 281 incidents consisting of 194

helping incidents (69.0%) and 87 hindering incidents (31.0%) that influenced their experiences of hope. The incidents were organized into the following helping and hindering factors categories listed and described below. Some of the described incidents related to more than one factor.

Participants' Definitions of Hope

Consistent throughout participants' definitions was the idea that hope was future oriented. One hundred percent of the participants included both the future and optimism in their definitions in some way, with 13 participants relating their definition to some kind of positive outcome or orientation. Ten of the participants related goals to their definition, either explicitly or implicitly. Furthermore, seven participants indicated agency thinking in their definition, with one of the seven also incorporating pathways thinking. Eight participants described their definition in terms of faith and 13 participants related their definition to some kind of positive outcome. One example of a participant's definition of hope follows:

I think hope [is] the drive in me…I always have a lot of confidence or … I just have the feeling like something good can come out of every situation. I will be able to just find where I need to go. Every bad obstacle that I have encountered in my life somehow…I've just pushed through it and then turned it around into something that can actually benefit me or … help me be a better person or just somehow … get past it. I think that hope is like that drive for me, it drives me to look at the situation and be like, 'no, you're not just gonna sit here and cry over it even though that's all you really wanna do'. [It] gets me up and … gets me going.

Another participant defined hope in the following manner:

What hope means to me is no matter how horrible the time I'm having, no matter how nothing seems like it's going right, I know that everything is happening for a reason and that somehow I have a hope, I just have this feeling that everything will work out in the end and everything will be as it should.

Barriers

During the interviews, participants identified a range of barriers including: physical and mental health; undiagnosed learning disabilities; sexual, physical, emotional and economic abuse; sexual harassment; financial and housing challenges; parents' divorces; neglect; death of loved ones; intergenerational conflict; body image concerns; and their own expectations and the expectations of others. It should be noted that the total scores on the Perceived Barrier Scale may underrepresent the level of barriers experienced by participants given the severity of some of the barriers they reported during the interviews.

Helping Categories

Participants reported a total of 194 helping incidents that positively influenced their experiences of hope. These incidents were analyzed and separated into 14 categories, all of which are reported. It should be noted that in some examples, the incidents described involved two or more categories.

Support. Support from others was the largest category with all 15 (100%) participants reporting that they received support from one or more of family, partners, friends, organizations such as the university, and pets. These sources provided encouragement, financial, and emotional support. Participants also used social media and networking to receive support. One participant stated "[mom's] just been that strong person for me. And I can call her … any time. She is really just that voice of reasoning and hope for me."

Another participant spoke about the support she received from a friend. This person said of her friend,

she is on track to [do] the same thing. We text … every day...She always … encourages me... She always says, 'we have to graduate together … I'm never gonna let you fall', et cetera, … so her words are very encouraging and definitely gives me hope.

Future goals. Eleven (73.3%) of participants had future oriented goals including obtaining a degree, or going to

Table 1

Categories of Helping Factors

Helping Factors	# of participants	% of participants	# of incidents	% of incidents
1. Support	15	100.0	47	24.2
2. Future Goals	11	73.3	20	10.3
3. Role Models	10	66.7	31	16.0
4. Attitude	8	53.3	25	12.9
5. Passion	7	46.7	12	6.2
6. Possibilities and Opportunities	6	40.0	18	9.3
7. Self-efficacy	6	40.0	8	4.1
8. Social/Professional Contribution	5	33.3	10	5.2
9. School	5	33.3	9	4.6
10. Spirituality	4	26.7	5	2.6
11. Refocusing Activities	4	26.7	5	2.6
12. Recognition and Achievement	3	20.0	9	4.6
13. Supporting Significant Others	3	20.0	3	1.5
14. Family Expectations	2	13.3	2	1.0

graduate school.. They also had goals of starting careers as a veterinarian, a pediatrician, an English teacher or taking over the family farm. They also had visions of starting a family, and being independent. They had smaller goals such as being published in a journal. One participant said, "knowing I'm going to school and there will be a change, and I can see my life hitting a major goal, that's what is inspiring and hopeful to me."

Role models. Ten (66.7%) participants reported that people in their lives have inspired them and positively influenced their experiences of hope. These role models included: family, friends, professionals, or public figures.. One participant discussed the influence a counsellor had:

Seeing how positively [working with her] affected my own thoughts and person in life, it really made me want to have that influence on someone else. I really wanted to ... be able to say, 'hey, I helped that one person and I changed their life in some way …

Attitude. A total of 8 (53.3%) participants described having beliefs or perspectives involving perseverance and gratitude, an ability to successfully overcome obstacles, and a trust that things will work out as they should. They reported sometimes using self-talk to strengthen their attitude. One participant described the attitude as "it could be worse", while another said "well there's nothing else you can do, right? You just have to keep going."

Passion. Seven (46.7%) participants reported having an intense enthusiasm for an academic discipline, a future career, or an activity like caring for children or animals that is personally meaningful. One participant, who had a current career goal of teaching English overseas, said

I really love learning, so … right now … I'm learning old English and learning … different texts from … the 18th century and all these things about … linguistics … I never knew there was so much that came with language and the technicalities … it's amazing.

Possibilities and opportunities. There were 6 (40%) participants who described feeling hopeful about possibilties and opportunities. Some described opportunities that already

exist, such as Co-operative Education. Possibilities were described as things that could happen in their lives if they tried. For example one participant was hopeful about the possibility of travelling independently in Europe while another talked about the possibility of starting a business. One participant described the opportunity to take a university course while still in high school,

> I had hope that I had the grades to do it. I believed in myself that I could … if I applied. I might as well apply because if you don't apply, you'll never know. And having hope that it will turn out in the end.

Self-Efficacy. A total of 6 (40%) participants reported having an awareness and knowledge that enabled coping, in addition to developing skills that enabled them to act and accomplish goals. One participant reported learning techniques to increase assertiveness and express her feelings and opinions, while another talked about being able to live independently and care for herself. One participant described

> [the counsellor] really helped me build up my confidence and taught me that I could tell people what they're doing is not right and if I didn't like it, I had a voice and I could ... voice my opinion.

Social and professional contribution. Five (33.3%) participants discussed either making or wanting to make small and large social or professional contributions in the present or in the

future. Examples of these contributions included seeing a need and wanting to fill it by pursuing a future career in healthcare, and presently using their skills and knowledge to help others by tutoring students or volunteering. One participant described how helping others by volunteering

> kind of keeps me going and just reminds me every day that I'm working with the girls, that … this is what I want to be doing, and these are the type of people I want to be working with for the rest of my life.

School. A total of 5 (33.3%) participants' reported experiences in high school or university that helped them feel hopeful. Participants described experiences that provided them with a sense of belonging, a positive environment, a structured process leading to an outcome such as a degree, and the ability to participate in research and completing projects that are meaningful to them. One participant talked about school in the following way: "the formality of having school there, the structure, that's just another thing that keeps me hopeful... I know that there's an outcome at the end of it."

Spirituality. Four (26.7%) participants described experiences involving organized religion that facilitated and maintained feelings of hopefulness. A participant discussed her,

> "faith in God ... and knowing that He's there with me every time ... I struggle or every time there's something good.

So in good times and bad times ... knowing He's there ... assures me that my future is going to be full of hope."

Refocusing activities. There were 4 (26.7%) participants who reported being able to refocus on themselves and the things that are important to them through activities such as sketching, exercise, or being in nature positively influenced their experiences of hope. These activities enabled them to distract themselves from difficult circumstances and provided opportunities to achieve clarity on direction and goals. One participant said,
I'm really into photography right now as well…. In a sense it detaches you, your brain is focusing so much on what you're doing, on that creative drive, that it takes away from anything [negative] that … is going on… I've found it to be like a great escape, … a great therapy.

Recognition and achievement. A total of 3 (20.0%) participants discussed how their skills, talents and efforts were recognized by meaningful people or organizations, which helped them to feel hopeful. Examples include receiving an award, earning good grades, being noticed by teachers and appearing on television.

Supporting significant others. Three (20.0%) participants reported that providing support to significant others including family, intimate

Table 2

Categories of Hindering Factors

Hindering Factors	# of participants	% of participants	# of incidents	% of incidents
1. Negative or Unsupportive People	13	86.7	17	19.5
2. Negative Emotions & Cognitions	8	53.3	21	24.1
3. Situations Outside of One's Control	6	40.0	13	14.9
4. Economic & Financial Challenges	5	33.3	10	11.5
5. School	5	33.3	7	8.0
6. Health (mental & physical)	4	26.7	5	5.7
7. Cultural Conflicts	3	20.0	6	6.9
8. Workload	3	20.0	4	4.6
9. Failing	2	13.3	2	2.3
10. Multiple Roles	1	6.7	1	1.1
11. Relationship Breakups	1	6.7	1	1.1

partners, and companion animals helped them to feel hopeful because they could see the impact of their care on their loved ones.

Family expectations. Two (13.3%) participants stated that expectations of their families motivated them to persevere and continue working to overcome challenges and achieve goals. One participant described how she wanted to uphold her family reputation, while another described how she wanted to satisfy her parents desire that she obtain a high quality and recognized degree from a respected university which prompted in part her family's move to Canada.

Hindering Categories

A total of 87 unique hindering incidents were reported and separated into 11 categories, all of which are reported. Many of these factors directly related to significant barriers reported by the participants. In some examples, the incidents described involved two or more categories.

Negative and Unsupportive people. The largest hindering category involved negative and unsupportive people with 13 (86.7%) participants reporting how experiences of individuals who behave negatively as hindering their experiences of hope. For example they described family, friends, professors or other people who were critical and discouraging. One participant stated, "[my mother] wants me to be like the other typical Chinese girl … skinny and slim … I just feel like it's not going to happen to me… [at] this point I basically feel I'm hopeless". Other participants reported uninterested, neglectful, abusive or absent people in their lives. Abusive incidents included economic, psychological and emotional abuse. One participant described how "it was the hardest

[when dad said something like] 'you are definitely not going to get your college fund now.'" Participants also described people who were disrespectful, cruel, manipulative, jealous or bullied others. Furthermore they also talked of individuals who were constantly complaining, wanting to see others fail or did not want or make effort to understand them.

Negative emotions and cognitions. A total of 8 (53.3%) participants reported the following feelings and thoughts as hindering their experiences of hope: fear of failure, fear of disappointing others, pressure to please others, self-doubt, negative self-talk, rumination, unreasonably high expectations for themselves,   uncertainty, reactions to conflicts in values, being overwhelmed, being intimidated by competition, and negative personal evaluations. These feelings and thoughts caused considerable

inner turmoil. One participant said, "I think the biggest one for me is fear. Fear of failure or fear of not being good enough, I think, is the hardest part for me… that really would hinder my hopefulness."

Situations outside of one's control. Six (40%) participants described negative and/or unexpected situations that they could not control. These instances hindered their experiences of hopefulness by introducing uncertainty and demonstrating they could not affect some aspects of their life. Examples included: unexpected eviction from their home, the state of the environment, being bullied, social and political concerns including religious freedom in their country of birth and corruption, negative consequences of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) ruling regarding the Penn State football team sexual abuse case, and parents' divorces. One person said, "I'm a really planned, meticulous person, … I usually have my life planned out three months in advance, so the entire idea of the uncertainty of the future definitely did add in to the removal of hope".

Economic and financial challenges. Five (33.3%) participants discussed how tuition increases, having to take out student loans, unexpected costs, seeing a friend being unable to obtain a job, and the state of the economy in the United States, contributed to their less hopeful feelings. Furthermore, partici-

pants from Penn State discussed how the financial impact as a result of the US $60 million in fines, the ban from playing in football bowl games imposed by the NCAA, the loss of scholarships, other penalties, as well as the anticipated loss of university and community revenue hindered their feelings of hopefulness. During one interview, a participant said,

> Participant: "they just raised tuition and with everything that has … been happening at Penn State, I can only imagine it's going to go up more … Plus it affects how many people will come into town and I'm a waitress. It actually affects my income…"
> Interviewer: "because if they can't play football, people don't come to the football games …"
> Participant: "to the games, and that's where I make all my money. Because I make $2.80 an hour, I think, plus tips. Maybe $2.83 or something. It's minimum wage for waiters and waitresses, but it's not nice if I don't have any tables.

School. A total of five (33.3%) participants discussed the effect of poor instruction, disinterested, unhelpful and unempathic faculty, and grades as having a deleterious impact on their feelings of hopefulness. One participant said,

> Sometimes when I go to talk to the professor and try to figure [something] out, it's like the professor doesn't quite get it either … like with my

biology class … it felt like some professors in my science majors, there's a few of them that seem like they're not very personable. So when you're trying to talk to them it's like they can't get down to your level. And so it makes you … frustrated.

Health. Four (26.7%) participants described issues related to mental and physical health including injuries and depression as negatively impacting their experiences of hope. One person stated, "I used to be really active and then I got injured and I went into a depression and then I just started eating and I haven't been able to get back to what I was …" Another participant talked about how the multiple injuries sustained during her military career negatively impacted her ability to attend classes:

> if I've been sitting in class for a long time they will start to hurt … and then I'll be concentrating more on the pain than class … I have medicine for it but I can't take those otherwise I would be drooling and passed out in class.

Cultural conflicts. Three (20%) participants discussed how family intergenerational expectations and acculturation issues affected them. One participant reported difficulties in expressing and communicating accurately due to cultural and language differences. Another participant described how the differences between military and civilian culture hindered her feelings of hope.

Workload. A total of three (20%) participants who were attending university full time while also working, reported difficulties in maintaining their hopefulness in the face of significant levels of work and multiple, competing deadlines under time pressures. One person said, "freshman year I only slept 3 hours a night maybe … I just didn't have time … with the way I had piled on."

Failing. Two (13.3%) participants reported that effort/reward mismatch negatively impacted their feelings of hope. Specifically they spoke about trying their best and still not succeeding at their goals. One participant reported "I'm really disappointed since I tried so hard for [the job] ...I do feel less hopeful because I really try hard. And I still didn't get what I want."

Multiple roles. One (6.7%) person reported described how the different roles she plays in her and her family's life hinders her feelings of hopefulness. She said,

> I also have a lot going on in my home life with my husband and my husband's family...He has kids, so I'm a wife, I'm a step-mother and I'm a student. And it gets kind of frustrating sometimes...if I have a lot of homework and everything but we have the kids and stuff … I have to try to separate … homework and spending time with the kids.

Relationship breakups. One (6.7) participant recounted how the end of a romantic relationship negatively impacted her feelings of hopefulness.

Discussion

Some of the participants' definitions of hope align with definitions in the literature in terms of goals and/or agency thinking, as suggested by Snyder (2002). However, only one participant demonstrated pathways thinking in their definition, which is in line with Sung et al. (2012) who suggested that pathways thinking was not predictive of educational and career development skills. Post-secondary students in this study may not consider pathways thinking as essential to hope. Moreover, eight participants defined hope in a manner that aligned more closely with Dufault and Martocchio (1985), particularly in terms of affective, affiliative, contextual and temporal aspects of hope. Furthermore, some participants related hope to some meaningful future outcome, which relates to Stephenson's (1991) definition. While some of the literature differentiates between hope and optimism and treats them as separate constructs, most of the participants used hope and optimism as synonyms in their definitions, which is reminiscent of Bryant and Cvengros's (2004) conclusion that there is some support for a unitary conceptualization of hope and optimism. The final finding with regard to the definition of hope is that faith seemed to be an important aspect of participants' definitions, with some explicitly

naming faith as integral, and almost synonymous, to hope. This finding seems to suggest that spirituality can be a helping factor for hope, and reinforces Ribton-Turner and Bruin's (2006) finding regarding the importance of spirituality as a coping aid during difficult career development periods.

There is no known published research investigating what helps and hinders undergraduate students with high levels of hope relative to high levels of self-reported barriers. For this reason, it is possible to consider most of the findings in this study as unique. The strongest pattern that emerged from the findings is the positive and negative impact of relationships on experiences of hope. During the course of the interviews, every participant identified either receiving or giving support to others as positively affecting their experiences of hope. Participants cited receiving support from at least one significant person in their lives. In addition, many participants cited role models, and/or positive school interactions as supporting their feelings of hopefulness. Conversely, 87% of the participants cited negative relationships as having a deleterious impact on their experiences of hope based on interactions with either negative and unsupportive people, relationship breakups or unsupportive experiences with instructors.

Another significant theme that appeared was the influence of personal factors including internal states and environmental factors on individual's experiences of hope. In this theme, the

internal factors that affected hope were future goals, attitude, passion, self-efficacy, social and professional contribution, refocusing activities, negative emotions and cognitions, and health. While only eight participants explicitly endorsed "attitude" as a helping factor, we observed during the interviews that all participants demonstrated the ability to positively reframe negative experiences and view them with what could be considered a positive attitude. The environmental factors that affected hope included support, role models, possibilities and opportunities, school, negative/unsupportive people, situations outside one's control, economic/financial challenges and school. A factor that could be considered both internal and environmental was spirituality which included being involved in organized religion and praying, along with upholding values and beliefs that were consistent with their spiritual practice.

Another theme that was revealed through the data was the role of the future and its impact on participants' experiences of hope. The future's influence was seen by some participants as positive, while others saw it as potentially problematic. Falling into this general theme includes future goals, possibilities and opportunities, social and professional contributions, and the uncertainty of the economy.

A final theme that surfaced was the demands of school and its interactions with different obligations in participants' lives including workload and multiple roles. Given the amount of school and responsibilities that we ob-

served, it is surprising that only four participants identified either workload or multiple roles as impacting their experiences of hope. Perhaps there is a threshold for the ability to cope with workload and multiple roles and it is possible that many of the participants were not at or over that threshold. For example, only one participant in the study was a parent. If the sample had included more parents, then more participants might have indicated multiple roles and workload could become a hindering factor.

For the factors that were reported by less than 25% of the participants, it is possible that these factors would have higher participation rates if there were more participants in the study who were older and/or more culturally diverse. As stated in the previous example, the participant who endorsed multiple roles was the only married participant and the only one with children. If the study was replicated with an older cohort that included more married individuals or parents, we may see more individuals reporting role conflicts. Additionally, had the sample been even more culturally diverse, we may have seen additional responses indicating cultural conflicts or family expectations impacting the individuals' experiences of hope. Furthermore, given that many participants cited factors that were related to parents divorcing, it is possible that with an older cohort we may have found a higher frequency of responses for relationship breakups.

These outlier categories suggest a need for further research for had we interviewed more participants

or different cohorts of participants, different overarching themes may have emerged.

A final observation of the findings was the impact of the sexual abuse case involving Penn State's football team which impacted the students who attended that university. Research is a snap shot of a particular time at a particular location, and the interviews at Penn State were conducted immediately after the NCAA made its announcement. The controversial events surrounding the case were widely discussed, and three of the five participants interviewed during that period identified the scandal, NCAA's decision, and its impact as having a role on hindering their feelings of hopefulness.

Implications for Counselling and Post Secondary Career Services

Hope is considered to be one of the factors that enables individuals to change their lives and to come closer to creating the life they desire to live (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Snyder, Michael, and Cheavens (1999) argue that hope serves as a unifying framework within the counselling process. Research also suggests that hope plays an important role within the first three to four weeks of counselling, perhaps because hope may strengthen belief in the possibility of an improved future (Hanna, 2002). The current study indicates the important role hope plays in personal and career development in the face of barriers. Consequently, the findings suggest several implications for

counselling and post-secondary Career Services departments.

Given the significant barriers reported by students and their influence on their experiences of hope, the findings emphasize the need for counsellors to be included in post-secondary Career Services departments. Historically, there has been an artificial divide between personal and career counselling (Niles & Pate, 1989); these findings illustrate the reality that the personal and career interact and influence each other and therefore the need for holistic approaches requiring counsellors to be incorporated into Career Services staffing. Therefore, understanding the influence of barriers on students, and what helps and hinders their hope can inform counsellors in their work and aid in facilitating learning, coping, and positive change and growth.

Counsellors can then assess the internal and environmental factors for both hopeful students and less hopeful students. They can help students become more mindful of their sense of hope by exploring what it means to them to be hopeful, and whether they experience hope in their lives. Given the theme of relationships, counsellors should explore the significant relationships in students' lives and how they might impact hope by asking who supports or does not support them? Who are their role models? What other positive and/or negative relationships do they have currently or have they experienced in the past? Internal and environmental factors also play a significant role in hope so counsellors should attend to both.

What helps the student personally feel connected to their hopefulness? Considering the student in context, what environmental factors are present or lacking, and are they helping or hindering. Counsellors can also explore the students' feelings about their futures, goals, possibilities, opportunities and fears, and how these factors might affect hope. Additionally, consideration must be given to workload, obligations, and multiple roles that influence students' level of hope. Finally, it is also important for counsellors to recognize and attend to any internal, academic and/or career barriers that the student has faced or is currently facing. With a more comprehensive understanding of students' hope and the factors that may impact it, counsellors can utilize interventions to help students capitalize on their strengths as well as bolster hope.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the qualitative study. Demographic information was gathered through the quantitative survey, however limited demographic information was systematically gathered during the qualitative study. We did not obtain standardized contextual information apart from their field of study, their year at school, and the participants' definitions of hope. For example, we could have asked participants how they funded their education, their living and working situation, and their family background. It is possible that gathering this information could have helped to in-

form the findings.

Another possible limitation to consider is that some interviews were conducted in person and others were conducted by phone. It is difficult to know if this change in procedure affected the quality of the interviews and therefore the findings.

Finally, participants were limited to the four institutions in Canada and the United States, with only seven participants from each country and one international student. The findings represent the experiences of students at their respective institutions. The sample from the quantitative study limited the sampling for the qualitative study. For the Canadian portion of the sample, participants were recruited using a list of students who had previously accessed career services at their respective universities. The majority of the sample from Penn State, Penn College and Thompson Rivers were Caucasian while the sample from UBC was predominantly Asian. The majority of the quantitative sample for all institutions was female. Further, the sampling in the study was limited to first- and second- year students. As a result, the generalizability of the findings to other populations and institutions is limited. Replicating this study with diverse populations is necessary.

Future Research

Since there is no agreed upon definition of hope, future research could revisit and refine the concepts, particularly around the ideas of pathways thinking, the inclusion of affective, affilia-

tive, contextual and temporal dimensions of hope, the cognitive and behavioural components of hope, and further exploration of the relationship between hope and optimism. Another direction of future research is around diversity and the impact of culture. The study could be replicated with more diverse populations, such as undergraduate students with high barriers and low hope, older workers, unemployed individuals, graduate students, and individuals who have multiple barriers. Furthermore, more diversity in terms of ethnicity, nationality, sexual and gender identity, and religion/spirituality could be very helpful. Although we obtained a diverse sample amongst the fifteen participants in the study, we suggest future research with larger diverse samples to examine the impact of culture on experiences of hope. Additionally, the factors that had less than 25% participation rate but were included in these findings require more investigation. Finally, a next step in terms of research includes the development and testing of hope-centred interventions to enhance the counselling process as well as clients' experience of hope, which may help them to make changes in their lives.

Conclusions

Given the relationship between hope and change and its role in unifying the counselling process, understanding what helps and hinders individual students' experiences of hope can inform counsellors' work. Participants defined hope as a multidi-mensional concept consisting of affective, cognitive, behavioural, affiliative, contextual and temporal factors. The strongest pattern that emerged from the findings was the positive and negative impact of relationships on students' experiences of hope. Important themes that emerged included the influence of internal and environmental factors on students' hopefulness. The internal factors that affected hope were future goals, attitude, passion, self-efficacy, social and professional contribution, refocusing activities, negative emotions and cognitions, and health. The environmental factors that affected hope included support, role models, possibilities and opportunities, school, negative/ unsupportive people, situations outside one's control, economic/financial challenges and school. A factor that could be considered both internal and environmental was spirituality. Another theme that emerged was the role of the future participants' experiences of hope. Falling into this general theme includes future goals, possibilities and opportunities, social and professional contributions, and the uncertainty of the economy. Finally, another theme that emerged was the impact of school and its interaction with different demands in participants' lives including workload and multiple roles

There is a need to ensure counsellors are incorporated in post-secondary Career Services staffing given the interaction between barriers, personal, and career development issues. Counsellors should attend to students' levels of hope and the role that it plays in their lives, capital-izing on the factors that can elevate hope in order to motivate and facilitate change and enhance personal and career growth.

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